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INTRODUCTION

1. What is a Pre-Release Center?

A Pre-Release Center is a residential facility for men or women who are returning to the community after incarceration. While the more common "halfway house" serves men and women who have already been granted parole status, the Pre-Release Center is designed for people who are still incarcerated in the state prison system. In fact, the Center is the probable forerunner of future prisons; that is small urban facilities that utilize maximum community resources for men and women returning to that community on parole. Pre-Release Centers are designed to provide services and opportunities for offenders rather than isolation and punishment.

2. Why is the program being Initiated?

The Massachusetts Department of Correction is moving towards a system of community-based correctional programs. While prisons have traditionally emphasized a structured rigid set of rules and daily schedules, the Pre-Release Center will stress individual decision-making and responsibility for one's actions. The Center will also emphasize community involvement and support for returning ex-offenders. By utilizing the services and opportunities provided by the community; it is anticipated that men and women will be far more successful in returning to a life which does not include criminal activity.

3. What are the objectives of the Center?

The Pre-Release Center is directed towards attaining the following objectives:

- A. To help ease the transition from the structured routine of prison life to the relative freedom and self-responsibility required by the larger community.
- B. To identify and assist in providing community services to men and women returning to their home community.
- C. To assist men and women in planning for a successful, crime-free life after their incarceration.

4. What Programs will be offered to Residents?

Every resident of the Center will participate in intensive orientation of the program while still at the correctional institution.

Individual planning and determination goals will be emphasized, with a total review of Center rules and policies. Upon arrival at the Center, new residents will participate in additional orientation sessions prior to work and educational placement.

5. Who will participate in the Program?

Residents of the Center must be returning to the immediate area after incarceration. A select committee consisting of correctional officers and institutional staff will screen potential participants for acceptance in the program. The Center will take all necessary precautions to insure that residents are properly screened and the program will be directed toward providing services to those men and women who need assistance in making a successful adjustment to the community.

6. How Can the Community become Involved?

One of the objectives of the Center is to involve the entire community in the reintegration process of offenders. We are hopeful that many people and groups will assist in helping residents feel accepted in the community.

THE PROBLEM

Recidivism

Nationally, two of every three released offenders return to prison within five years. An adult released from a correctional institution will soon be back often within a year. This recidivism (or repetition of crime by an individual) often results from an inability of the ex-offender to find meaningful employment or because of restricted employment opportunity.

Lack of Employment Opportunity

A number of recent studies have demonstrated the very high unemployment rate among recently-released prisoners.

The problem is staggering. The ex-offender unemployment rate, for example, far exceeds that of other persons in the labor market.

To some extent, this high unemployment is due to the lack of previous work experience and skill training found among certain portions of the offender population. On the other hand, much of the high unemployment rate can be accounted for by a reluctance of some business organizations to hire an individual with a criminal record, and by the existence of certain specific legal employment barriers.

The Barriers of Employment

Many ex-offenders' only employment problems are the barriers they face in applying for a job. Employers frequently use arrest and conviction records as screening devices without regard for individual differences.

Lack of Supportive Services and Job Placement Assistance

Leading experts in the correctional field have suggested that investment in educational and job placement services would go a long way toward alleviating many of the employment problems of offenders, thus also curtailing the high rates of recidivism found in our criminal justice system. However, prisons and correctional institutions have traditionally been unable to provide meaningful training programs and successful job placement assistance.

As will be explored further in this Position Paper, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is moving to meet many of these needs.

Lack of Available Alternatives to Incarceration

An overview of the problems of the correctional process should mention the fact that there is a great need for development of a number of alternatives to incarceration. There are several reasons for this. It is clear that incarceration alone does not rehabilitate, and it is generally accepted that the prison system is far too effective in reinforcing negative attitudes.

This being the case, alternatives to incarceration increasingly are being sought. To break the tragic circle of recidivism, the offender's community must assume an active involvement in his rehabilitation. The inmate's problems are in the community. He must learn to cope with them there and not at some distant secluded institution. The directions of change are toward the community, toward differential handling of offenders, toward a coherent organization of services.

Such structures as community-based correctional centers permits a person to live in his own community and to maintain normal social relationships while providing control, guidance, and access to rehabilitative resources and employment opportunities. It is more efficient, economic and humane approach to the treatment of the offender.

A second promising alternative, both to incarceration and prosecution, is the use of pre-trial diversion programs. These programs serve clients who have been arrested and charged with a criminal or penal offense. If a person has successfully completed participation in a program, he can obtain dismissal of charges without regard to guilt, and a trial or a guilty plea. There is a highly successful program currently in operation in the Boston Area.

Further, incarceration is an expensive process, involving scarce tax dollars. It has been estimated that it costs in excess of \$10,000.00 per year to incarcerate an individual in Massachusetts correctional institutions. In addition to this, the potential earning power and tax payments of the incarcerated individual are lost, and his or her family may have to resort to public assistance. Therefore, the total actual cost may be of excess of \$10,000.00 per year to the taxpayer.

Rehabilitation Means Employment: Steps Toward Solutions

If we are to solve the tragic and wasteful cycle of recidivism, ex-offenders must be given an opportunity to find and hold meaningful employment.

Massachusetts prisons and youth correctional facilities will release hundreds of men and women this year. There are currently thousands of individuals incarcerated in our correctional institutions and many more on parole. Numerous others will pass through the county correctional institutions this year, and still others will be convicted of a crime and have a permanent criminal record.

For a good number of these individuals, rehabilitation means employment. To realize this goal, several things must be realized.

Business and Labor Groups Must Realize that Few Ex-Offenders Can be Classified as Hardened Criminals.....

While newspaper reports daily on vicious criminal acts, they seldom report the majority of victimless crimes. For example, non-violent white collar crime arrests for acts such as forgery, embezzlement, and fraud occur nine times more frequently as those for murder.

Even among those who commit serious property crimes, economic necessity rather than criminal intent appears to be the most common motive. The idle poor are frequently driven to crime out of boredom and the personal tragedy of poverty they must face every day. Many are faced with an alternative of either denying their family or resorting to crime. As is evident by the disproportion of crime among low-income groups, crime is frequently a reaction to one's intolerable living condition, rather than an independent merciless act.

In point of fact, the ex-offender population is, in general, no different from other disadvantaged groups in Massachusetts. Many ex-offenders are similar to other disadvantaged individuals in terms of background and personal characteristics. Therefore, they are not likely to be the most preferred employees in terms of attitudes, education or skills.

Fear of associating with ex-offenders, which results in negative hiring attitudes, is still perhaps the greatest barrier to employment. Business losses due to theft have increased, and employers have become increasingly afraid to take any risk which might further increase their losses. In addition, the stereotype of the ex-offender as murderers and rapists promotes concern among employers for the welfare of their employees.

Many of these fears are simply unfounded. In many cases, the only difference between an ex-offender and another employee may be that one was caught. Parolees, in fact, are sometimes an even better risk than other employees. They know they are being watched and also are less likely to risk a parole violation for the type of petty crimes most common in corporations. Finally, ex-offender employment success data argues in favor of parolee employment.

Business Must Realize That the Ex-Offender can be a Valuable Resource....

Numerous businessmen who have hired ex-offenders can attest to the fact that they can be valuable employees.

The value of the ex-offender as a manpower resource may be particularly valid in light of the number of new commitments to education and training for the offender now being made in Massachusetts. In point of fact, these new programs will create a pool of trained personnel from which business and industry can draw. The pool can offer significant advantages in many cases over hiring blind in the labor market.

Business Investment in Offender Employment is the Single Most Immediately Effective Means to Curtail Recidivism -

While various governmental agencies can do much to implement rehabilitation programs and provide vocational training for incarcerated individuals all of this will be meaningless unless an offender is able to find employment. Unless assimilation into the community is facilitated by the availability of suitable jobs, confinement in state correctional institutions will continue to be a wasteful and expensive revolving door system. Several points should be stressed.

1. Ex-offenders can be trained and placed in employment, regardless of previous education or the nature of their crimes.
2. When ex-offenders are placed in appropriate jobs, their rate of recidivism is two to three times less than that of ex-offenders who do not receive job assistance.
3. Ex-offenders with better paying jobs are much more likely to experience success than those with no jobs, part-time jobs, or lower paying jobs.

What Can Employers Do?

This overview has covered a number of important areas: The importance of employment in rehabilitation; various state efforts; and the need for business involvement. What remains is a concrete discussion of how employers can develop and implement successful programs to hire an ex-offender.

Participate in Work-Release Programs -

An employer might also consider participating in the Work-Release Program. This program is designed to permit select inmates who are capable of handling a minimum security environment, to leave their institution on a daily basis to hold a job in the community. There are many advantages to the inmate in this program. For example, he has an opportunity to gradually re-adjust to the community and to save money to help re-establish himself upon release. A number of companies have participated in this program, with a high degree of success.

In-Prison Training Needs the Involvement of Private Business -

While significant efforts to launch educational and training programs have begun, current resources will not be sufficient to assist all offenders. The correctional system still faces the problem of limited resources, limited knowledge, and a limited

rehabilitation potential.

What is distressing is that prisoners could, if resources were available, spend their detention time in productive activities. Except for maintenance activities in the prisons, which in themselves may not provide adequate or meaningful training, inmates can spend many hours in idleness. Much of this time could be used productively in education, counseling and training. Prisoners are anxious for these activities in order to reduce their idleness, increase their employability, and improve their prison records for the Parole Board. Correctional officers are generally favorable toward such projects but lack the resources and skills for successful implementation.

What is needed to develop these services are the resources, expertise, and influence of private corporations.

Most importantly, companies can provide the enthusiasm and resources necessary to bring about more effective prison reform in this area.

There is no question that this kind of project requires a serious corporate commitment. However, it is also clear that pre-release training, followed by employment in related jobs, has the great potential as a long-run solution to the problem.

Use Existing Agencies to Supply Assistance for Program Implementation

Many of the supportive services required to employ ex-offenders can be supplied by various governmental and private organizations. These services are an essential part of any employment program. Some of the services which these organizations provide include counseling, referral services to other agencies, screening and placement, basic education, job development and follow-up.

The Massachusetts Department of Correction Program can provide you with information on the services that are available or supply the services directly to you. These services include:

1. Pre-Release counseling and job development services for residents in all state correctional institutions;
2. Job placement services throughout the state;
3. Supportive services to recently released residents;
4. Technical assistance to business organizations interested in initiating ex-offender programs;
5. Manpower Service Centers in the state which service a variety of offender-clients, including pre-trial divertees.

Consider Initiating Employer-Sponsored Programs to Provide Required Skill Training and Education

While outside agencies can provide a variety of supportive services, individual companies are best equipped to develop employment-related programs. In particular, they could initiate basic education and skill training activities to aid in the career development of ex-offenders. Many of these programs simply involve extensions of those developed for other disadvantaged groups.

How to Get Started

Actions by business and labor organizations can have a significant impact on reducing crime by providing employment for ex-offenders, since it is well proven that jobs are a critical factor in reducing recidivism, increasing the self-esteem of the ex-offender, and reducing the tragic impact of crime in our society. Business has the resources, abilities and leadership to implement a variety of efforts to provide ex-offenders with employment. This Position Paper has provided some of the necessary knowledge about ex-offenders employment while suggesting some specific approaches to these problems which can be considered.

All that is needed is a commitment to action !!! The following is a suggested way to get started:

Top Executives should Make a Formal Action-Oriented Commitment

Since any ex-offender employment program will entail planning and co-operation, top management support is required to ensure that the necessary resources are devoted to the program. The leadership position of these individuals is also essential to gain the support and involvement of middle and lower managers. As this Position Paper has suggested, a business organization's action program may take one of several directions, from a simple commitment to hire ex-offenders, to the development of an in-services training program.

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